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ABSTRACT

An overview of English language education in Nepal is provided, and a discussion of a study focusing on the English language education situation in Nepal is presented. The investigation sought to answer the following questions: (1) What kind of English curriculum does Nepal have? (2) Who designs and prescribes curriculum, curriculum materials, and textbooks? (3) Do the teachers have any role in the curriculum process? (4) What kind of background do the teachers have? and (5) Are there enough teaching and learning aids available? Answers to these questions are provided, and some of the most prevalent problems that English language teaching (ELT) is facing in Nepal are revealed. (GLR)

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English Language Teaching in Nepal:
A Descriptive Survey Report

--Ram Ashish Giri

Introduction

English in Nepal has a long tradition of being officially taught and learnt as the only foreign language. However, it still has not come out of the limited purpose of reading literature and writing. It used to be, to a limited degree, a medium of instruction in the past. It still is so in some disciplines such as medicine, enginnering, etc. But it has recently turned out to be what is called " the library language" serving the purpose of reference only.

The curriculum and syllabus for English have undergone several changes and modifications. Initially, they used to be an incorporate of that of some North Indian school and university, and therefore literature-based, taught and learnt by the Grammar Translation Method. As Dr. Rathebone observes:

"Even after the foundation of a native university, the people who planned the Nepalese curriculum were trained in India. Thus it came about the English syllabuses were literature -based and the methodology was the Grammar-Translation. Teaching and learning of English was equated with teaching and learning of formal grammatical system, reading literature and moral philosophy, inculcation of classical humanistic spirit and cultural enrichment. This was essentially the method used in India and in other countries prior toward War II, and still persists in Nepal in some ways even now" [1977].

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The NESP Era

In the sixties, the teacher educators and personnels felt the need of changing the objectives of the English Language Teaching [ELT]. It was realized that changeover from the formal grammar and translation method of teaching English to the structural pattern was necessary and statutory in the light of the latest trends of methodology of teaching foreign languages.

And therefore, with the introduction of the New Education System Plan [NESP] in 1971, an overall change was brought in the entire system of ELT. A new set of objectives was formulated, new curriculum and syllabuses designed, and new sets of textbooks prescribed.

The most significant change was, perhaps, the one made in the orientation of the curriculum. The orientation was shifted from literature to language. Another significant change was made in the methodology. The officially suggested method for the ELT was "eclective" in form and philosophy, and was called the " Oral Structural and Situational Approach".

Many people, today, believe that the NESP which lasted for about a decade was an achievement in many ways. Firstly, it brought awareness for education in the people, secondly, the school and campus enrollment increased very sharply, thirdly many new schools and campuses were opened throughout the country, and finally, the primary education was declared " free". Whatever the achievement in quantity and physical set up; so far as the quality of education is concerned, it remained stagnated [Davies

cited by Giri 1985]. It, in fact, deteriorated [Koirala 1984] in several ways.

In terms of ELT, as in quality of education in general, the NESP has been what is said to be " a voyage to limbo". As it is said earlier, the objectives, the syllabus, and the textbooks, in the NESP, were replaced by new language-based curriculum and textbooks. However, the teacher who taught the syllabuses/ textbooks remained the same. Over seventy-five percent of the total teachers' population were untrained at that time, and therefore, incapable in handling the new curriculum with the officially suggested new methodology.

There are three things that a teacher needs in order to be able to provide effective language lessons. They are:

1. a knowledge of the best and most effective methods to use

2. an understanding of the aim and purposes to each method he uses,

3. confidence and skills in his handling them, with perseverance and courage to carry on the work with good humor and enjoyment.

The teachers of Nepal, as it will be discussed later in this paper, lacked all this. In addition to this, their poor language proficiency also impaired the quality language instruction.

The concerned agencies at the center i.e., Kathmandu, in the lack of appropriately trained man-power, were unable to provide necessary expertise and guidance. The accomplishment of the desired objectives, therefore, handicapped by the poor management and inadequate supervision, remained a far-fetched ambition.

The Recent Trends:

English, despite its status as a foreign language, has gained an inseparable position in the Nepalese tradition. It is a part and parcel of education at every level. It is particularly fundamental and a basic requirement to the higher education. And with the advancement of scientific technology and the world communication, its importance is growing everyday.

After a decade's experiment on the NESP that created in education "a road to nowhere", once again the changes have become inevitable.

Some changes have already been introduced in the higher education. The annual system of education replaces the semester system of the NESP, the syllabuses have been modified and , in some of the cases, new textbooks have been prescribed. Nevertheless, the basic problems remains the same.
At the school level, no changes whatsoever have been introduced so far. However, the concerned agencies seem to be in the favour of doing so in the near future. A team of British and Nepali experts has reportedly been engaged in developing new curriculum and textbooks.

This study, which is a descriptive survey of the existing ELT situation, was conducted at the time when the NESP was what may be said in its climax years. The purpose of this paper is to give an account of the situation in which the ELT takes place.

The Study

The reason I chose to make a survey of the ELT situation in the schools was the impact of the school level ELT the instructors at the university level were experiencing with the entrants particularly to the Proficiency Certificate [I.A.] level.

The teachers/ instructors teaching English in various campuses throughout the country complained, as Mr. Regmi, an expert at the Curriculum Development Center,Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur, Kathmandu, observed, that most of the students studying at the proficiency Certificate level [over 75 %] could neither comprehended plain prose nor produced acceptable sentences and that they were not at all capable of working out, even to the tolerable extent, a comprehension exercises constructed on a passage of fairly moderate language level" [1977].

Dr. K. P. Malla, the foremost professor of English made a similar remark in his Views and Reviews of Teaching English. He made an observation that reveals a painful fact that, " not even five percent on the university entrants have the English proficiency that they should have by the time they leave school [1977].

To quote Dr. Rathebone's contextually appropriate observation again:

"A student who enters a college in Nepal generally suffers from an inability to understand even the simplest spoken and written English, and is unable to speak or write intelligible English himself-an inability resulting from a very small working vocabulary and inadequate grasp of basic structure and almost complete lack of practice in basic skills" [1977]

The compulsory English Committee at the Curriculum Development Center, Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur, Kathmandu, made a survey of teaching and learning of compulsory English in 1984. In its report, the committee made remarks similar to that of Dr. Rathebone:

"The English language competence of the students entering the proficiency certificate studies is far lower than is generally expected of them. There is, therefore, a big hiatus between what they already know and what they have to know. Paradoxically, it is better to make them unlearn what they learnt at the school than to try to build upon their inordinately poor language background."

The location of the study was Pokhara, a small town 200 kilometers west to Kathmandu, the capital city. I chose Pokhara for the study because it has all the characteristics that a representative location should have. Firstly, it is away from the center. Secondly, it is a developing place. Thirdly, it could easily function as satellite for the neighboring schools. And finally, it is growing as a center for tourism.

The following assumptions had been the theoritical basis for the study. Firstly, adequately trained, qualified and efficient English teachers were not available. Secondly, the schools were not well-equipped for the teaching of English. Thirdly, the teaching and learning materials were not available. Fourthly, the medium of instruction was not English. Fifthly,

the teachers did not honestly follow the guidelines set for the teaching of English at the school level. And finally, the students were not sufficiently exposed to the language or engaged in the learning activities.

The study concentrated on:

1. what techniques and how appropriately the teachers used them in order to revise a lesson.
2. What techniques and how appropriately the teachers used them in order to present a new lesson
3. what techniques and how appropriately the teachers used them for carrying out the lesson in the practice phase
4. what techniques and how appropriately the teachers used them in order to evaluate the lesson at the end of the class
5. what techniques and how appropriately they were used in the teaching of the writing skills
6. what visual aids and how appropriately they were used during a lesson
7. how appropriately the teachers used the prescribed textbooks during a lesson
8. What language and how appropriately the teachers used it as a medium of instruction
9. how far and how well the students participated in the lesson

Procedure

Ten secondary schools of Pokhara Town Panchayat and neighboring villages were randomly selected. Three classes of each of the three grades of the

secondary level - grade viii, grade ix, and grade x, were observed in each of the selected schools.

The data on the observation were recorded on prepared observation sheets. On the basis of the findings of the observation a post-observation interview was developed and the concerned teachers were interviewed. The interviewer had seven written questions before him at the time of the interview. The interview was recorded in writing.

The data from the observation as well as the interview were tabulated, classified, analyzed and interpreted. A summary of the findings is given below:

Findings

One of the major concerns of the study was the techniques the concerned language teachers employed in order to [1] revise the previous lesson, [2] present a new lesson, [3] carry on the lesson in the practice phase, and [4] evaluate the lesson. The following table provides instances of the techniques used and their percentage.

Table-1: Techniques used and their percentage

Techniques/purpose	Revision	Presentation	Practice	Evaluation
Question/Answer	37.7	3.3		20
Summarizing	7.7			12.2
Reading		73.3		4.4
Writing				5.5
Discussion				
Imposition	55			
Story telling				
Demonstration				
Play way				

Drilling	23.3		
Structural			
Oral		15.5	
Situational		9.9	
Lecture		75.5	
Others			57.7

As the table above suggests, most of the lessons [55%] were imposed without any revision of the previous lesson or any significant link between the previous lesson or the new lesson. The danger of this practice is that, in the lack of a clear connection between the pre-learning and the present learning, the student may fail to build -in the present lesson on what he has learnt before. About 37% of the lesson began by asking the students questions on the previous lessons. Some of the teachers summarized the previous lessons [7.75] before they began a new one.

Most of the new lessons [73%] began by asking the students to read a particular passage of the textbook during which the students picked up new vocabulary. The teacher, then, provided them with the Nepali equivalent for the words. Some lessons [23%] were presented by using the drilling technique. The teacher wrote the structures on the chalkboard, explained some grammatical points here and there in Nepali, and asked the students to drill them. A few attempts [3.3%] were made in order to start a lesson by asking questions relevant to the topic or passage under discussion.

The practice phase of the lesson was carried on mostly by lecturing [75.5] on the passage or grammatical structure. In other words, the teachers lectured on the problem to enable the students comprehend it rather than

to enable them to produce the language or the language item. A few attempts [15.5%] were made to provide oral practice, and in meaningful situations [9.9%].

As for the evaluation, most of the teachers never evaluated the lesson [57.7%] at the end of the class. They did not try to see if the students learnt what they were trying to teach. Some teachers did it by using the question-answer technique [20%], some by asking them to read some section of the passage[4.4%] and to write sentences [5.5%]. Some teachers just summarized the lesson and ended it [12%].

One other dimension of looking at the techniques used in the teaching and learning of English is to see how far the techniques used were suitable.

In this study attempts were made in order to find out the appropriacy of the techniques. Such a judgement is very much susceptible to the observer's subjectivity. Nevertheless, the observer had certain criteria in mind to judge whether a given technique was suitable, not suitable, clear or confusing.

When an adopted technique was timely, situationally appropriate, and academically relevant to the students, it was said to be suitable. When it did not meet the above criteria, it was unsuitable. When the technique was intelligible and readily understood by the learners. it was said to be clear, otherwise confusing.

Table 2 : Appropriateness of the Techniques

Techniques		Suitable	Unsuitable	Clear	Confusing
	Revision	14.28	85.71		
Q & A	Presentation	66.66	33.33		
	Evaluation	28.84	55.76		15.38
	Revision	42.85			57.14
Summarizing	Evaluation	45.45			54.54
	Presentation	19.69	76.76		5.54
Reading	Evaluation		100.00		
Writing		100.00			
Drilling		76.90	23.80		
Oral		100.00			
Situational		33.33	66.66		
Lecture		11.76	80.88		7.35

The question and answer technique was used for three purposes- revising a previous lesson, presenting a new lesson, and evaluating the lesson at the end of the class. However, its use was satisfactory only in the case of presenting a new lesson [66.66%]. Its use was highly unsatisfactory in the case of revision [85.71%] and fairly unsuitable for evaluation [55.76%]. The use of summarizing was fairly confusing in the revision [57.14%] as well as in the evaluation [55.76%]. The use of reading in the presentation of a new lesson, and evaluation was very poor. The teachers tried to conduct oral drills in meaningful situations. However, they failed to contrive appropriate contexts. Their lengthy explanation [lecture] on the passage or grammatical structure was unnecessary, inappropriate and uncreative. The teachers lectured on undesirably when they should have spent their time on providing meaningful practice. A few teachers asked their students to frame sentences on a given structure or

answer questions on the passage which provided useful practice on what had been taught.

Table 3 : Use of the Visual materials / Textbooks

	relevant	irrelevant	suitable	unsuitable	clear	confusing
Charts/maps/diagrams		4.4				
Pictures/drawings		4.4				
Real Objects						
No Materials				91.10		
Textbooks		60.43		39.62		
Supplementary Materials						

Most of the schools did not have instructional materials. The teachers concerned did not construct them themselves. Therefore, most of the lessons were taught without any visual aids. The teachers did not even care the pictures given in the textbooks. Some of the teachers did carry maps , charts, and some other ready-made materials to their classes and hung them on the front walls, but never mentioned them again thereafter.

As for the textbooks and supplementary materials, the teachers limited themselves to the prescribed textbooks. Most of them never brought any topic or/and any structure or any passage to discussion that were not given in the textbooks. Some of them followed the textbooks very closely. Others skipped things here and there. In general the use of the textbooks was fairly acceptable. However, they were expected to use them as the

sample materials, and therefore, provide as much supplementary materials for further practice as possible.

Table 4 Medium of instruction

	Overall %	Suitable	Unsuitable	Clear	Confusing
Nepali	85.5	22.02	71.42	6.49	
English	14.4			23.07	76.96

Only a few teachers spoke English to teach English. But the sad thing is that their English was more often confusing [76.96%] than intelligible [23%]. On the other hand, most of them made an accessive use of Nepali as their medium of instruction. The use of Nepali, too, was untimely, unnecessary and inappropriate. They used it almost for everything- from giving meaning of words to summarizing lessons at the end. More often than not the observer had the feeling that there was no teaching of English at all.

Table 5 Techniques used to seek students' participation					
	overall %	Suitable	unsuitable	clear	confusing
stimulation	43	33.33			66.66
motivation					
Context/situation	22	70.00	30.00		
Question/Answer					
Role Play					
None	34.4				

Fairly good number of teachers encouraged their students to participate in the lesson. However, their attempts were mostly unsuitable [66.66%]. Their encouragement was either too vague or too confusing. Some teachers

successfully tried to create situations in order to seek their participation. A considerable amount of lesson went without seeking students' participation.

To sum up this section,

1. Most of the previous lessons went unrevised.
2. Almost three-fourth of all lessons started by asking the students to read the passage from the textbooks.
3. On the practice phase, the teacher lectured on the grammatical structure or passage in question most of the time,
4. Most of the lesson were not evaluated at the end of the class,
5. Most of the techniques used to revise the lesson, present it , provide practice on it or to evaluate it were either inappropriate in the context available or confusing,
6. Only the question-and-answer, summarizing, writing and oral drilling techniques, which were used very limitedly were appropriate.
7. Most of the teachers never used any visual materials. If they did, they were, more often than not, inappropriate,
8. The teachers made an accessive use of the Nepali language. It appeared that the English lessons were not teaching English at all.
9. Most of the time the students did not participate in the lesson, and the teachers did not sufficiently encourage them to do so,
10. No supplementary materials as such were used. the teachers limited themselves to the prescribed textbooks very closely.

Discussion

Given the fact that most of the teachers teaching English in Pokhara are trained, and also that Pokhara is a tourist center, it is but natural to expect the ELT to be in good shape. It is an irony that, when the importance of English is growing everyday, its teaching is deteriorating.

It is interesting to note here that the children and adults in the Phewa Lake Side, where most of the international tourists dwell, are better in the oral English proficiency than the so called educated children. This brings us to the controversy that started with the Krashen's theory " Is language teachable?" [see Krashen 1982, see also Pienemann,1989]. This is, however, not the domain of this paper.

The fact that Pokhara is geo-politically the second important place in Nepal makes us believe that if such is the case of Pokhara, the ELT situation in other parts of the country is the same if not worse. The large classes, acoustically poor classrooms, untrained and unqualified teacher [only 33% of the total teachers population are trained], lack of instructional materials, lack of motivation among teachers, and above all poor management and supervision still aggravate the problem.

The problem does not seem to bother the concerned authorities. Their policies and approaches to ELT have so far not been appropriate. And, they seem to be complacent in what has been done and in what is going on in the ELT classrooms.

The Institute of Education [now the Faculty of Education] , the sole responsible agency of the Tribhuvan University for training teachers has, as they say, degenerated considerably since its establishment thirty years ago. The educationists in Nepal allegedly blame this situation to the present university policies towards it which have jeopardized the functioning of this institution in several ways.

What ever the reason for the present situation, to bring about improvement in the ELT in Nepal has become today's necessity because with the advancement of world communication, the importance of English is increasing everyday. New curriculum may easily be developed, and new sets of textbooks may be prescribed, but the ELT will not improve unless the situation in which the ELT takes place is improved; and the teachers, the key figure in the entire ELT situation, are well-trained, well supported, and are given proper orientation.

This has been only a descriptive survey of the existing English Language Teaching situation. How much of the present situation can be attributed to the existing curriculum, the textbooks, the teachers, and the present ELT policies is yet to be explored.

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